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**Dealing with the Emotional Consequences in the  
Aftermath of Terrorism**

The unprecedented and continuous news coverage of the devastating attacks of terrorists against New York City and Washington, D.C. can cause psychological trauma for children and some adults, according to California's State Mental Health Director Stephen W. Mayberg, Ph.D.. "The lack of clarity about who and what caused this and the reruns of scenes of death and destruction heighten the emotional trauma," Dr. Mayberg said.

"In this time of national tragedy, many people are in a heightened state of emotional vulnerability," Dr. Mayberg said. "One impact – and indeed an end goal of terrorism – is to create insecurity and to threaten our emotional well-being."

Children and the elderly are often the most vulnerable to the impact of trauma, according to Dr. Mayberg. "Young children and elderly people may experience a sense of helplessness, and children especially worry about the potential loss of their parents or families."

Children may be particularly fearful of the dark and being alone, or even going to sleep at all. The elderly, or those with existing heart conditions, may become even more anxious about any chest pains or hear palpitations. Those who have recently suffered other losses, such as death or divorce, may be even more vulnerable.

Common reactions in children include:

Crying  
Fear of the dark/being alone  
Appetite loss  
Poor school performance  
Confusion/irritability

Thumbsucking  
Headaches/stomach upset  
Nightmares  
Bedwetting/bowel-control loss  
Depression

Childrens' reactions should not be ignored. Although their behavior may disrupt the family, this is the time they need support, love and flexibility. It is generally not helpful to ask a child how he or she feels but rather what effected them the most or what concerns them the most. Children may be very inconsistent and uneven in their response so that they may behave as if nothing has happened for a period of time, alternating with periods of sadness and agitation. In talking with children rather than asking how they feel, one may ask when they heard the news, what affected or concerned them the most. A parent should discuss those issues openly. Children should be encouraged to talk about their fears, reassured that they are safe and supported and their fears realistically acknowledged. Sometimes children act out rebelliously because of inner fears. This is not abnormal.

If stress, anxiety, depression or physical ailments continue, parents may wish to contact disaster recovery services through local crisis counseling centers in county mental health departments.

Some common responses by adults are as follows:

Irritability/anger	Sadness/tearfulness
Fatigue	Headaches/nausea
Loss of appetite	Hyperactivity
Sleeplessness	Lack of concentration
Nightmares	Increased alcohol or drug use

These reactions are usually normal reactions of normal people to an abnormal event; however, if they persist one should seek assistance through the local mental health crisis-counseling center.

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